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Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement

Luke introduces **Barnabas**, born **Joseph**, as **a Levite and native of Cyprus (Acts 4:36)**. **Joseph** being the second most popular **Jewish** name of the Second Temple period, **his** nickname may have been necessary to distinguish him from the numerous others bearing the same name. **Luke** interprets the **Aramaic** "Barnabba" as meaning **Son of Encouragement**.

While it is difficult to determine the exact biblical relation between **Levites** and **prophets (Second Chronicles 20:14ff)**, the fact that the B'rit Chadashah places **Barnabas** among **the prophets** and **teachers** in the church at **Antioch (Acts 13:1)**, and implies that **he** as a gifted evangelist **(Acts 11:24, 14:12, 15:2)** may reflect his education as **a Levite**. **His** freedom to travel may likewise support the suggestion that **Levitical** service at the Temple was not compulsory **(Jeremias, Jerusalem: 213)** and that some (many?) **Levites** could be town teachers. Despite the social standing of craftsmen, the profession of a scribe was not considered lucrative, most scribes beginning their apprenticeship at a comparatively late age when the families could afford to forgo their potentially decreased income. Since ordinary priests appear to have been considered rich, it seems reasonable to conclude that the scribal class came almost exclusively from wealthy, distinguished families – including **Levites**.

The fact that **Barnabas** owned property **(Acts 4:37, 12:12)** possibly reflected the wealth of **his** family. Despite the biblical limitations on **Levitical** sale of land **(Numbers 35:1ff)**, both **Jeremiah** and **Josephus** – both from priestly families – apparently owned land **(Jeremiah 32:6ff; Josephus *Life* 422)**. Whether such limitations applied in the Diaspora is not easy to tell, although it is declared: **Be careful that you do not neglect the Levite as long as you live . . . in your Land (Deuteronomy 12:19).** This would not include the Diaspora, meaning that **a Levite** would have been no different than any other poor person and need not be supported (as **a Levite**).

It cannot be conclusively determined whether **Barnabas'** estate was in **Cyprus** of Jerusalem. Some of his relatives apparently lived in the Eretz (Land of) Isra'el, **his** cousin's mother **(Miriam, John Mark's mother)** owned a house in Yerushalayim

(Acts 12:12; Colossians 4:10) and **Barnabas** evidently lived, at least semi-permanently, in the City. If this family was also of Levitical ancestry, it is possible that they lived in the priestly quarters of the Upper City. **Mnason, one of the early disciples,** was also a **Cypriot** living in Zion **(Acts 21:15-16)**.

According to **Luke**, **Barnabas** served as **Paul's** first "mentor" on returning to Jerusalem as a follower of **Yeshua** after spending three-and-a-half years in Arabia, introducing him to **Peter** and **James** and witnessing to the authenticity of his calling (**to see link click Ai – Harmony of Acts 9 and Galatians 1**). Having been sent by the Messianic community in Jerusalem to Syrian Antioch, he, in turn, sought Paul out in Tarsus in order to have Paul join **him** in **encouraging [the new Gentile believers] to remain true to the Lord with heartfelt devotion (Acts 11:22-23).** Having taught together in the church at Syrian Antioch (see the commentary on **Acts Bj – The Church in Syrian Antioch**), **the elders** commissioned both Paul and **Barnabas** to **send relief to those brothers and sisters living in Judea, each according to their ability (Acts 11:29).**